

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Old Cathedral

AND/OR COMMON

St. Francis Xavier Church

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

205 Church Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Vincennes

VICINITY OF

8th

STATE

Indiana

CODE

018

COUNTY

Knox

CODE

083

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

\_\_\_ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

\_\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_\_ SITE

\_\_\_ OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

\_\_\_ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

\_\_\_ BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

\_\_\_ IN PROCESS

\_\_\_ BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

☒ OCCUPIED

\_\_\_ UNOCCUPIED

\_\_\_ WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

\_\_\_ YES, RESTRICTED

☒ YES, UNRESTRICTED

\_\_\_ NO

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_\_ COMMERCIAL

☒ EDUCATIONAL

\_\_\_ ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_\_ GOVERNMENT

\_\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_\_ MUSEUM

\_\_\_ PARK

\_\_\_ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

☒ RELIGIOUS

\_\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_\_ OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Catholic Diocese of Evansville

STREET & NUMBER

219 N.W. 3rd Street

CITY, TOWN

Evansville

VICINITY OF

STATE

Indiana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Knox County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

8th Street

CITY, TOWN

Vincennes

STATE

Indiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

\_\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITOR FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

☒ EXCELLENT

☐ DETERIORATED

☐ GOOD

☐ RUINS

☐ FAIR

☐ UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED

☒ ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE

☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Old Cathedral, started in 1826, is now associated with an old library (1840) now the Christian Life Center, a rectory (1840), St. Gabriel College (c. 1837), and the Old Cathedral Library (1968) to form a complex of compatible buildings located in the Vincennes Historic District.

Old Cathedral is the key building in this complex. Built on or near the site of earlier churches, this simple, Greek Revival church is in excellent condition, having been maintained continuously. The building is brick bearing wall of a reddish orange color laid in Flemish bond; it is rectangular in shape with an apse at the south end. There are three front bays, five bays on each side, a high wood framed tower with galvanized iron trim a tower straddling the ridge at north end of gable roof. The pedimented facade has three semi-circular arched doorways with corresponding arched sculptural niches above; brick buttresses separate bays on side elevations. The roof gives a Greek Revival feeling to the building even though there are no columns or pilasters in the front. Three voids on the first level feature four panel doors with semi-circular glass transoms. The interior has large wooden Doric columns dividing the nave from aisles, a semi-circular chancel at the south, a wooden balcony at the north end of the nave, painted canvas ceiling, and a crypt below apse.

From the laying of the cornerstone in 1826 to 1920's several alterations were made to the exterior and interior of the Old Cathedral. In 1839 and 1840 Bishop de la Hailandiere added the apse, spire, clock, and four round venetian glass windows in the apse showing St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John; and a crypt under the apse. Paintings of the Stations of the Cross were executed in France, admitted to the United States duty free by special act of Congress and were installed from 1879 to 1890. New windows were placed in the side walls in 1908, and high brick buttresses were constructed at same time to support the side walls. The second level voids were closed in 1911, and statues of St. Joan of Arc, St. Francis Xavier, and St. Patrick were erected in the recessions in the 1920's. The statue of St. Joan is thought to be the first one erected after her canonization in 1920.

Other structures in the complex blend well with the architecture of Old Cathedral. The old library building (now Christian Life Center) was construction in 1840 immediately southeast of the Cathedral on Church Street. This building is one story on a high basement featuring a hip roof with end chimneys.

The facade is brick bearing wall of Flemish bonded red brick. Three voids give the front elevation a symmetrical appearance. Doors in the center void are capped with an arched glass transom, and side windows are also arched. The voids are separated by low relief brick pilasters below a pediment. The Rectory was constructed in 1840; it is a two and a half story structure on a raised basement with brick bearing walls with common bond. The low hipped roof has one gable on the east, south, and west faces. There is a brick cornice; the main door with its straight transom sidelights and the porch on Church Street is a later alteration. In recent years a two story addition and one story garage of brick have been added to the rear of the structure. About 1837 the one and a half story brick on a high basement, St. Gabriel College structure was built as a seminary and was related to the College of Vincennes. All that remains of the original college is the small brick building which was restored in 1954 by the Fourth Degree Knights of Columbus, Assembly of Indiana. The new library (1968) building

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at the back of the courtyard is a one story brick structure with a low hip roof. The double door entry in the center of the front facade with arched glass above the doors resembles the entrance to the old library. Low relief brick pilasters beneath a pediment separated slight arched recessions.

The Old Cathedral and its dependancies with their brick construction and similar roof, entry, and window lines, blend well into a complex of buildings which support one another.

# SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1826, 1840  
1908, 1911

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Old Cathedral in Vincennes is significant because of its architectural merit and association with the early historical development of the area. The Old Cathedral represents the role of the Catholic Church during the periods of French rule and early years of United States control.

The architectural significance of the church is due to the fact that it is an excellent example of a Greek Revival church. Started in 1826 and finished in 1840 with slight exterior alterations in 1908 and 1911, it reflects a concept of unity that is rare. The early Greek Revival style was popular in the first half of the nineteenth century. Interior features of unusual quality from the 1800's are stained glass arches over the doorways, the bishop's chair, octagonal pulpit on a raised pedestal, and stone baptistry. The Crucifixion behind the main altar was painted in 1870 on plaster by the German artist Lamprecht, who decorated more than 300 churches in the United States. Interior columns supporting the roof are poplar logs covered with lath and plaster.

The rectory and old and new library buildings are not only good examples of period architecture but also illustrate how old and new buildings can blend together and serve a useful purpose.

The Old Cathedral is one of the few remaining visible evidences of French influence in Indiana's development. Jesuit missionaries passed through the area sometime before the first log chapel was constructed in 1794 on or near the site of the Old Cathedral. The present structure replaced in 1826 a second log church erected in 1786.

The Old Cathedral parish had important ties to George Rogers Clark's capture of Fort Sackville, which helped secure the Old Northwest Territory for the United States. Father Pierre Gibault, whose statue now stands in front of the Cathedral, was the individual credited with winning the French civilians of Vincennes to the American cause prior to Clark's arrival; during the siege most Frenchmen maintained a benevolent neutrality while a few actively aided Clark. Colonel Francis Vigo, a Spanish trader belonging to Father Gibault's parish, provided Clark with important information about the British capture of Vincennes. Vigo later moved to Vincennes and died there in 1836. The Northwest Liberty Bell in the upper belfry of the Cathedral was brought from France in 1742 and on February 25, 1779, rang out news of the surrender of Fort Sackville which had taken place in the first log chapel.

The first log churches recorded and sanctioned births, education, marriage, and burials in the community. The strong Catholic influence in education in the Vincennes area continued after Americans occupied the region. Father Jean R. Rivet, pastor from 1796

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to 1804, became headmaster of the Jefferson Academy and Congress granted him \$200.00 to teach Indians in the area. Territorial Governor William Henry Harrison thought enough of Father Rivet, who was one of the first public school teachers in Indiana, that he sent his sons to him for instruction. One of the most learned men in America, in the 1830's was Bishop Simon Gabriel Brute, who established Vincennes College in 1836. This institution was to be a college and seminary for young men training for the priesthood under the direction of the Eudist Fathers. In 1835 he had his books sent from a school that he had established in Emmitsburg, Maryland; these volumes reflected his interest in all aspects of life and became the basis for the first library established in Indiana.

Old Cathedral represents the popularity of Greek Revival architecture in the Midwest in the early 1800's. More importantly remains as a symbol of the French Catholic influence in Clark's capture of the Old Northwest in the Revolutionary War and in Indiana's colonial and educational development.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Basilica of St. Francis Xavier; Story of the Historic Old Cathedral. n.p., n.d.  
Available at Basilica of St. Francis Xavier.  
Cauthorn, Henry S. A Brief Sketch of the Past, Present and Prospects of Vincennes.  
Vincennes: A.V. Crofts Book and Job Printing Rooms, 1884.  
Greene, George E. History of Old Vincennes and Knox County, Indiana; 2 vols. Chicago:  
S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1911.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A 16 453540 4181080  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
C         

B           
ZONE EASTING NORTHING  
D         

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Miss Esther Cunningham, Research Director

ORGANIZATION

The Old Cathedral

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

205 Church Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Vincennes

STATE

Indiana

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE   

LOCAL   

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

March 30, 1976

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER